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UNCLAS ABUJA 000017

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Army Fights Fundamentalist Group in Yobe

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1. (SBU) On Christmas Day, Nigerian members of an extremist Islamic sect destroyed the police station in the town of Kanamma in Yunsari Local Government Area (LGA) in Yobe State near the border with Niger, killed a policeman, and carried away arms and ammunition. The sect lost three of its own members in the process. They kidnapped three other policemen whom they later released.
2. (SBU) On December 28 they moved south to Geidam LGA, still in Yobe State near the Niger border, where they attacked three police stations. The group then reportedly attacked a police station in Damaturu (about 200 km further south), the Yobe State capital, in the early morning of January 1. The group was repulsed, though two officers were killed. Between December 29 and January 1, a small joint force of police and army launched a retaliatory attack and pushed the group out of Kanamma and Geidam. The leader of the sect was captured (name reported as Mullah Musa), varying reported numbers of sect members were killed, four police officers were killed, and numerous sect members have fled into the wild leading to reports that clashes are continuing. Local media reported on January 6 that seven members of the group were arrested in Difa, Niger.
3. (SBU) State Governor Bukar Abba Ibrahim claimed many "Taliban-oriented radicals" seeking an Islamic state had been killed in the military attack and that the group was "effectively crushed." Ibrahim said the group migrated from Maiduguri in Borno State and set up a camp in an open area between Yobe State and the Niger Republic. The governor stated that his government had sought to persuade the group to move on after complaints from local residents but that instead they had turned on security forces. The governor referred to the group as "Muhajirun," a term used for Islamic freedom fighters, and "Hijrah." Media reports listed the name of the group as Al Sunna Wal Jamma, with numerous translations.
4. (SBU) The GON has not been able to confirm any of the various reports about the group's origins or agenda, other than the attacks above. Some press reports say the sect is made up of mainly middle-class Nigerian university students and graduates based in Maiduguri and inspired by the Taliban's vision of an Islamic state. During the last Eid-el Fitr, they reportedly distributed leaflets in which they accused the government of fraudulent activities and non-adherence to Shari'a.

ROBERTS